

5 Ways to Ensure Your Kidney Is Healthy

Written by Taylor Seely, National Kidney Foundation
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While it's not the most glamorous of "holidays," March is National Kidney Month, and unfortunately, more than 600,000 Arizonans have kidney disease, but only 10 percent are aware.

The disease's symptoms are relatively silent, not recognizably occurring until the disease has reached its most severe levels, when warning signs can include blood in the urine, swelling in the legs and more.

Residents who have been diagnosed with diabetes and/or heart disease should also be particularly cautious, as many doctors have deemed kidney and heart disease and diabetes as the "triple threat."

"These three diseases are very much linked together," says Dr. Savas Petrides, a board member from the National Kidney Foundation of Arizona. "If you have one, you have to ask, do I have one of the other two?"

So what exactly *does* the kidney do? The kidney is a vital organ, working as a processor of all things unwanted in your body. Without it, humans cannot live.

Processed foods are high in preservatives, salt and fat, and animal meat is particularly acidic, all of which are ingredients that the kidney has to work extremely hard to digest. Therefore, a healthy diet comprised of plants and veggies, which are alkaline-based, not acid-based, means less work for the kidney, translating to a longer-lasting life.

But because most of us like to enjoy a juicy steak here and there, or stop at the drive-thru more than we'd like to admit, it's important to stay on top of our kidney health, and luckily, there are ways to stay safe.

In honor of it being National Kidney Month, The National Kidney Foundation of Arizona is offering up five simple tasks locals can take to ensure kidney health.

1. **Get Tested.** Ask your doctor for an ACR urine test or a GFR blood test annually if you have diabetes, high blood pressure, are over age 60, or have a family history of kidney failure. The ACR urine test looks for protein in the urine, an indicator of kidney disease, while the GFR test measures how well your kidney is filtering the unwanted toxins. Get screened for free through the National Kidney Foundation's KEEP Healthy program by visiting www.kidney.org.
2. **Limit Over-the-Counter Drugs.** Over-the-counter pain medicines, such as NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like Ibuprofen, Advil and more), may alleviate your aches and pains, but they can harm the kidneys, especially if you already have kidney disease. Reduce your regular use of over-the-counter drugs and never go over the recommended dosage. Dr. Savas Petrides warns not to take these medicines on a daily basis – try to limit dosages to less than three consecutive days.
3. **Cut the Processed Foods.** Processed foods can be significant sources of sodium, nitrates and phosphates, and have been linked to cancer, heart disease and kidney disease. Try adopting the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) to guide your healthy eating habits. Learn more about the diet by clicking [here](#).
4. **Exercise Regularly.** Your kidneys like it when you exercise. Regular exercise will keep your bones, muscles, blood vessels, heart and kidneys healthy. Getting active for at least 30 minutes a day can also help control your blood pressure and lower your blood sugar, which is vital to kidney health. It is important to clarify, however, that exercise does not cancel out the risk anti-inflammatories pose to kidney health. Therefore, athletes who commonly ingest anti-inflammatories after strenuous activity are still at risk for kidney disease.
5. **Control Blood Pressure and Diabetes.** High blood pressure and diabetes are the leading causes of kidney disease and kidney failure. Managing high blood pressure and strict control of blood sugar levels can slow the progression of kidney disease. Speak with your doctor if you are having trouble managing diabetes or high blood pressure. Readers concerned about blood pressure can also purchase at-home measuring devices around \$20 from local pharmacies that measure "with pretty good accuracy" according to Dr. Savas Petrides. With certain diagnoses, some insurance companies will reimburse customers for these at-home devices.